Mysterious Bobby Keesee Held in Ransom Note Case

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SANTA ANA, Calif., May 29 (UPI) The FBI today held Bobby Joe Keesee who has popped up repeatedly in mysterious international incidents, including the return of American POWs from North Vietnam, in connection with the unsolved disappearance of a U.S. diplomat in Mexico.

Keesee, 40, was arrested Tuesday and charged with trying to obtain $250,000 by extortion in the case of Vice Consul John S. Patterson.

Patterson vanished from the consulate in Hermosillo, Mexico, on March 22, and was reportedly last seen getting into a car with a man described as looking like an American. Patterson's wife has said she has tried to deliver ransom for him, but was unable to make connections.

The FBI said there is no evidence that Keesee was connected with the disappearance of Patterson, but he is charged with "causing to be delivered" to the consulate a ransom note demanding $250,000.

Keesee, who gave his occupation as cabinet maker, was arrested by FBI agents outside his home in Huntington Beach on a complaint issued in San Diego, taken before a federal magistrate in Santa Ana and held in lieu of $100,000 bond.

Keesee, then a civilian, surprised American officials by turning up among the POWs released by North Vietnam in March, 1973. The State Department said it had no idea the North Vietnamese had a civilian prisoner, although his appearance seemed to confirm a report by a charter pilot in Bangkok that a mysterious American hijacked his plane on Sept. 18, 1970, forcing the pilot at gunpoint to land him on a beach in North Vietnam.

In 1962, Keesee went AWOL from Ft. Huachuca, Ariz., flew a small stolen plane to Cuba and asked for asylum. The Castro government sent him back to the United States, where he faced 153 federal charges.

He was convicted of interstate transportation of a stolen car, and the other charges were dropped. He said at his trial that he was working for the CIA and the escapade was part of a CIA plan to establish his "cover" for future operations. The CIA denied any connection. He served five years and was paroled in June, 1965.

He next turned up among 57 hostages held and released by Palestinian guerrillas in an Amman, Jordan, hotel in June, 1970.